

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

Claim 1 - A method for stabilization of vertebrae adjacent an intervertebral space, such as during a spinal fusion procedure, the steps including:

inserting an elongate primary segment between the vertebrae; and

inserting an elongate secondary segment between the vertebrae, with the secondary segment crossing the primary segment.

Claim 2 - The method of Claim 1 wherein said primary segment inserting step occurs along a primary segment insertion pathway substantially colinear with a long axis of the primary segment; and

wherein said secondary segment inserting step occurs along a secondary segment insertion pathway substantially colinear with a long axis of the secondary segment, said primary segment insertion pathway and said secondary segment insertion pathway crossing each other.

Claim 3 - The method of Claim 2 including the further step of sequencing said primary segment inserting step to precede said secondary segment inserting step.

Claim 4 - The method of Claim 2 wherein said primary segment insertion pathway is aligned with a primary posterior implantation site adjacent a patient's spine; and

wherein said secondary segment insertion pathway is aligned with a secondary posterior implantation site spaced from the primary implantation site.

Claim 5 - The method of Claim 1 including the further step of passing the secondary segment through the primary segment to completely cross the primary segment.

Claim 6 - The method of Claim 1 including the further step of passing the secondary segment over the primary segment to completely cross the primary segment.

Claim 7 - The method of Claim 1 including the further step of passing the secondary segment under the primary segment to completely cross the primary segment.

Claim 8 - The method of Claim 1 including the further step of rotating at least one of the segments after at least one of said inserting steps.

Claim 9 - The method of Claim 8 including the further steps of:

configuring the primary segment to have a greater height between a top surface and a bottom surface than a width between side surfaces thereof;

configuring the secondary segment to have a greater height between a top surface and a bottom surface than a width between side surfaces thereof;

rotating the elongate primary segment about a long axis thereof after said primary segment inserting step; and

rotating the secondary segment about a long axis thereof after said secondary segment inserting step.

Claim 10 - The method of Claim 1 including the further step of expanding a height of at least one of the segments to increase a height of the segment between a top surface and a bottom surface thereof.

Claim 11 - The method of Claim 10 wherein said expanding step includes the step of advancing a spreading element longitudinally through an interior of the segment to move the top surface of the segment away from the bottom surface of the segment.

Claim 12 - The method of Claim 11 including the further step of providing the spreading element in the form of a wedge and configuring the segment to include a longitudinal bore having a height which tapers over at least a portion thereof such that linear advancement of the wedge between a proximal end of the segment and a distal end of the segment causes the top surface of the segment to move away from the bottom surface of the segment.

Claim 13 - The method of Claim 1 including the further steps of:

locating a distal end of the primary segment spaced away from a distal end of the secondary segment; and

locating a proximal end of the primary segment away from a proximal end of the secondary element.

Claim 14 - A method for stabilization of vertebrae adjacent an intervertebral space, including the steps of:

- providing an elongate primary segment having a distal end spaced from a proximal end;

- inserting the primary segment between the vertebrae along a first pathway;

- providing an elongate secondary segment having a proximal end spaced from a distal end;

- inserting the secondary segment between the vertebrae along a second pathway to a location where the distal ends of the segments are spaced from each other and the proximal ends of the segments are spaced from each other; and

- orienting the second pathway crossing the first pathway.

Claim 15 - The method of Claim 14 including the further steps of:

- orienting the first pathway substantially linearly and aligned with a first posterior incision in a patient, the first incision defining a first implantation site for the primary segment; and

- orienting the second pathway substantially linearly and aligned with a second posterior incision in the patient defining a second implantation site for the secondary segment.

Claim 16 - The method of Claim 15 including the further steps of:

- configuring the primary segment to have a height between a top surface and a bottom surface greater than a width between side surfaces thereof;

- orienting the primary segment with the side surfaces initially adjacent the vertebrae during said primary segment inserting step;

- rotating the primary segment to bring the top surface and the bottom surface of the primary segment into contact with the vertebrae;

configuring the secondary segment to have a height between a top surface and a bottom surface greater than a width between side surfaces thereof;

orienting the secondary segment with the side surfaces initially adjacent the vertebrae during said secondary segment inserting step; and

rotating the secondary segment to bring the top surface and the bottom surface of the secondary segment into contact with the vertebrae.

Claim 17 - The method of Claim 16 including the further steps of:

expanding a height of the primary segment between the top surface and the bottom surface thereof; and

expanding a height of the secondary segment between the top surface of the bottom surface thereof.

Claim 18 - The method of Claim 17 including the further step of delivering fusion material into the intervertebral space.

Claim 19 - A method for inserting an implant with a first elongate segment and a second elongate segment into a patient, with at least a portion of the second segment crossing the first segment, the implant inserting method including the steps of:

making a first incision at a first implantation site;

inserting the first elongate segment through the first incision and along a first pathway to an implantation site within the patient;

making a second incision at a location spaced from the first incision; and

inserting the second elongate segment through the second incision and along a second pathway to the implantation site.

Claim 20 - The method of Claim 19 including the further steps of:

configuring the first segment to have a height between a top surface and a bottom surface greater than a width between adjacent side surfaces;

orienting the first segment with the side surfaces facing away from the second pathway during said first segment inserting step;

rotating the first segment to cause at least one of the side surfaces to face the second pathway;

configuring the second segment to have a height between a top surface and a bottom surface greater than a width between side surfaces thereof;

orienting the second segment with the side surfaces facing away from the first pathway during said second segment inserting step; and

rotating the second segment to cause at least one of the side surfaces to face the first pathway.